



## **NEWS FROM NOAA**

**NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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Contact: Brian Gorman – Northwest  
(206) 526-6613  
Jim Milbury – Southwest  
(562) 980-4006

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### **NOAA DESIGNATES EXTENSIVE AREA OFF WEST COAST AS ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT**

***Prohibits Bottom Trawling and other Fishing Methods in Large Areas***

Today, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration approved a plan to establish and protect more than 150,000 square miles of marine waters off the West Coast as Essential Fish Habitat. The plan prohibits fishing methods within much of this area that can cause long-term damage to the ocean floor, such as bottom trawling. Developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the plan is aimed at replenishing fish stocks. It covers an area from Canada to Mexico, out to 200 nautical miles in some places. NOAA is the federal agency that oversees management of ocean fishing in the United States.

The approval of the plan will provide much-needed habitat protection to areas that are essential to commercially valuable fish. The habitat protection comes on the heels of recommendations by national review panels that the government should do more to protect pristine ocean areas and fragile habitats. The action is considered part of achieving sustainable marine fisheries under the Administration's National Ocean Policy.

"This is the first time we have taken such an extensive approach to protecting offshore habitat," said Bob Lohn, head of NOAA Fisheries Service's Northwest Region in Seattle. "Over the long run, we expect that not only will we have a healthier ocean but that the fishing will get better as well."

The plan was developed with support and advice from both environmental and fishing industry groups. The agency added that its own economic analysis of the closures, based on historic data on landings, showed that less than ten percent of revenue from commercial fishing comes from areas that will be closed. Even that loss is expected to be made up as fishermen move their operations to areas that remain open.

Although NOAA Fisheries Service does not have regulatory authority over non-fishing activities that may damage habitat, the plan includes designating various habitats such as kelp, sea grass and estuaries as "habitat areas of particular concern." This designation will alert other agencies that are active in these areas that NOAA Fisheries Service may have conservation recommendations to ensure projects do not harm bottom-dwelling fish.

NOAA Fisheries Service said it would not include in its areas of particular concern any of 13 decommissioned oil rigs off the California coast, included in the council's original proposal, that can attract a wide array of plants and animals and serve as productive habitat areas on their own.

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“We’re not opposed to considering leaving some or all these platforms in place to serve as fish habitat,” said Rod McInnis, head of NOAA Fisheries Service’s Southwest Region in Long Beach, Calif., “But we think it’s premature to designate them as special habitat areas until we have a better understanding of how they can best contribute to habitat protection and growth.”

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>